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Fresno Bee

Mineral King — Colorful Names, Legends

By Virginia Williams
Fresno Bee correspondent

THREE RIVERS — In this jet age there are only a few who, when traveling the steep, winding 28 miles to Mineral King, are aware the road is dotted with place names that were as familiar at the turn of the century as freeway markers are today.

And few give more than a passing thought to the springs and creeks along the way that once were so vital to sweating horses and boiling automobiles of early-day travelers.

Some of the place names were obvious landmarks or were simply the name of a landowner. Others are such colorful titles as Hard Scrabble, Slapjack and No Man's Land. Some still are in use, but others are almost forgotten.

Mrs. Grace Alles of Three Rivers has vivid recollections of those places and the original route that now are wrapped in the history of the once booming mining area. She is the daughter of I. D. Mullinex who homesteaded Atwell's Mill and has spent every summer but four in her little cabin there since 1887.

When the road to Mineral King was built by Jim Crowley in 1879, the freight wagons and stages wound up Red Hill after leaving the Kaweah River. Next came The Summit where the road started down through Bear Ranch and crossed the East Fork at River Bridge. There was a toll gate there until the county took over the road. That part of the road, which was later abandoned, twisted its way up the east side of the canyon to Oak Grove. It now is grown over with brush, but can be seen across the canyon from several vantage points on the present road.

From River Bridge the road went around Cape Horn down near the bottom of the steep canyon, then started a torturous climb up River Hill. There was Ash Bend, Horseshoe Bend, then Hard Scrabble, so named because it was the toughest part of the climb to Alpine View and Glenn Rock on High Point. The going was easier across the Cain's Flat to Oak Grove.

About 100 yards above Oak Grove is Champagne Gulch and the reason for its name is lost in the past. Mule Creek is next and it, too, has no surviving story. Lake Canyon, the next in line, however, got its name because of a small lake miles above in the timber.

Cold Springs has a chapter in history linked with the park and a controversy over the right of way. It is on the park boundary and there was once a ranger station there. The controversy came to a head and was settled when determined citizens refused to be stopped by a cable which had been stretched across to block the road.

Lookout is the next location and was named because it commands a sweeping view up and down the canyon and gives the traveler his first look at Sawtooth Peak and the Great Western Divide. Swallow Rock towers over the road above Lookout and Slapjack offers the first water supply in many miles.

Slapjack got its quaint name because a man named Smith, a packer who hauled supplies into Mineral King, had a great appetite for pancakes. The story goes that he was camped with a road - building crew and long after the men had finished breakfast continued to wolf down pancake after pancake. Finally, the cook told him, "Smith, you can eat more pancakes than anyone I ever saw — you should be called 'Slapjack'." Tradition has it Smith consumed 64 pancakes.

Trauger's is the next wa-

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ter and the place where Mary and Henry Trauger had a home. However, Mrs. Alles says Mary Trauger told her on several occasions that she had named the place Last Chance because she had tuberculosis and was not expected to live long. Mary Trauger did live though, for many years, and was loved by all who knew her because she made countless trips to Mineral King on foot to nurse the sick. Later she moved down to Bear Ranch where she lived for several years on an oak-dotted flat across the river from the present ranch house.

Wolverton Point got its name from Jim Wolverton who homesteaded the property. It now is a heliport, but for years has been used by fishermen as a place to take off on a trail down to the river. Redwood is an obvious name becaue of the stand of Sequoias there, and Timber Point is where the road enters the first timber.

Conifer was named by the park service, but it was originally McFadzean's. Jim McFadzean homesteaded the property and operated a shingle mill there. A mile below Atwell's Mill is Davenport — a homestead of Jeff Davenport. He built a cabin there, but there is no sign of it today.

Judge J. A. Atwell bought most of the Mullinex property and built a lumber mill. An enormous wheel, part of the mill machinery, still is in the meadow there.

Cabin Cove had several names and it too, has a chapter in history. It was first known simply as Scott's because Fred Scott, who was district attorney at the time, built a cabin there. The Forest Service surveyed the property and laid out lots for cabin sites. Then the park service made a survey and the area was called No Man's Land until the difference in the boundary was settled and it was included in the park as Cabin Cove.

On up the road is Deadwood and next is Silver City which was first known as Weisher's Mill. A short distance above Silver City is High Bridge where the road turns sharply at an almost vertical gulch. That portion of the road was abandoned and the present road soars out around Highest Point in a breathtaking sweep over a sheer drop of more than a 1,000 feet. The original road graded around higher up the mountainside and portions of it still are there. There was a wood bridge high over the gulch, then the road continued up Graveyard Hill to Highest Point. At one time there was a sheep camp there.

Graveyard Hill was named because of a grave, and until last summer, there was a marker on a tree. There are many stories about who was buried there — all the way from a man who was lynched, to a little girl. But Mrs. Alles says a man who died of natural causes is buried there. His name has been forgotten.

Highest Point is indeed the highest point and from there the road drops down to The Gate. A gate still is there and it was built to keep cattle out of Mineral King. Until recent years, the area below the gate was used as a summer range.

Faculty Flat did not have a name originally. It got its name after a number of teachers built cabins there. The last landmark before the road turns into the Mineral King valley is at the foot of the last short grade. It is called Coral Rock and it kept its name even though a snowslide carried the huge boulder clear across the river in 1906. And it still is there, along with the other legendary place names that played a prominent role in the history of Tulare County.

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